KATE FRENCH: Thank you for the opportunity to comment today. My name is Kate French, and I have traveled here as a volunteer from Montana on behalf of Northern Plains Resource Council and the Western Organization of Resource Councils. I want to comment today on how the Federal Coal Leasing Program under current regulations affects us in the west. The negative effects of coal mining are both fiduciary and ecological. From the threat mining poses to pre-existing stable and vital economic sectors to the tax burden foisted upon the public, coal development under current regulations weakens our state's long-term economic stability. In Montana and Wyoming, most coal is mined in the Powder River Basin. And it is also an area that is home to thousands of farms and ranches. In some counties, agriculture -- the agricultural sector provides more jobs than any other sector. Most of the coal mined in the PRB is federal coal, as you saw earlier. Strip mining that coal severely threatens water quality, water quantity, and the viability of our agricultural sector. The runoff from unreclaimed mine lands pollutes our water, and this contamination often leaves streams too salty to use for irrigation or cattle production. Coal seams also serve as vital aquifers for the area, and mining that coal often severs these aquifers, and that dries up natural springs and leaves many wells able to be dried up. Excuse me. Even underground (Inaudible) mining has an effect in cases of (Inaudible). There are oftentimes subsidence cracks and that leaves land no longer intact and affects the underlying hydrologic balance in these areas. This severely affects the insurance viability in the area. All over the West, the dismal rate of reclamation takes its toll on state and local coffers as well. In Wyoming, where self-bonding is allowed, known to recently bankrupt coal companies seem to be able to pay it for the cleanup that was basically insured by the self-bonding process. And taxpayers are the ones who are forced to pay for this burden. The leasing, bonding, and bid rates set for federal coal mining is intended to count for all these externalities. However, in the West, these costs are far from sufficient. Half the funds collected through federal coal mining in Montana goes back to the state and to our local budgets and this pays for schools and roads. So, when the externalities are not taken into account, this severely affects what we can fund in our state. It is clearly not in the public's best interest for the federal government to continue subsidizing coal development when that development benefits a handful of company executives and leaves taxpayers on the hook for the cleaning up the mess. A more transparent process that adequately assesses the true cost of coal from mine to power plant is a critical necessity, and I appreciate the Department of Interior's effort to evaluate this program. Thank you.